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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8870
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1591
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9555
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0632
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 000057

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/10/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY SAYS NO TO POLITICAL ROLE,
EXTRA-CONSTITUTIONAL ACTION FOR NOW.

REF: A. DHAKA 39

[1](#)B. DHAKA 32

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Political factions, leading business organizations and civil society are seeking international support for military solutions to the present political crisis, creating intense pressure on the military to act. Our embassy, the British High Commission and other missions in Dhaka continue publicly and privately to oppose any extra-constitutional role for the military. The military is presently constitutionally deployed to maintain law and order. Senior military officers so far vow to keep the military politically neutral and to refrain from unconstitutional actions. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Representatives of various political factions have approached the US and other Missions with military solutions to the present political crisis, echoing suggestions by civil society and the business community. The most common variation has the military persuading President/Chief Advisor Iajuddin Ahmed to a) postpone elections from six months to two years; b) resign as Chief Advisor; and c) appoint a new Chief Advisor and council and/or a National Unity Government. One scenario sends BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and AL President Sheikh Hasina into political exile, possibly in another country. Others include a state of emergency (declared by either the Caretaker Government or a newly elected BNP government after January 22) in which the military would have a large policy/political role, or martial law, or a coup. Some say the military is hesitant to engage without a signal from the US.

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador and others in the Embassy have made clear in both private meetings with political and military leaders (reftels) and publicly that we categorically do not support any extra-constitutional role for the military. We further emphasize that the present situation is the result of political disagreements among the parties and requires a civilian, political solution; the military must continue to act solely under and in support of the civilian government and within the boundaries of the constitution.

No Military Support for Martial Law/Coup

14. (S/NF) The Ambassador and DATT met January 7 with Army Principal Staff Officer Major General Md. Jahangir Alam Choudhury (the senior military officer in the military) to reinforce our positions against military intervention and solicit his views. DATT held a similar meeting January 9 with Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Moeen U Ahmed. Both officers said there is no appetite among military officers or the rank and file for martial law, a coup or any other extra-constitutional action by the military and said they would not support such actions. "Why would we support a coup," Jahangir asked, "when we don't even like the current deployment?" (NOTE: The military is currently constitutionally deployed to maintain law and order. See paras. 7-9.) Jahangir emphasized that even discussion of such actions is illegal and any soldier caught doing so would be subject to arrest. He urged the Ambassador to continue to press the Caretaker Government to resolve the political crisis and to tell the political parties not to provoke the military as it maintains law and order. Moeen told the DATT he had similar discussions with the British High Commissioner on January 8.

State of Emergency up to President but Not Desirable

15. (S/NF) Jahangir and Moeen both stressed the decision of a civilian government to declare a constitutionally permitted state of emergency is a political decision for the President, emphasizing the military is subject to civilian control and has a duty to remain impartial. Neither believed they or other military leaders should approach the President to "press," "suggest," "recommend," or otherwise try to influence him on political decisions concerning how to resolve the political impasse.

DHAKA 00000057 002 OF 003

16. (S/NF) Jahangir said he asked the President to avoid declaring a state of emergency arguing it would not enhance the military's ability to support civilian law enforcement in maintaining law and order. He is also concerned there is no clear exit strategy from a state of emergency. Moeen noted that the current situation does not warrant a state of emergency but acknowledged the army is doing contingency planning. Moeen said he could envision a state of emergency "if anarchy prevails" but doubts it would come to that before elections on January 22; rather, he is more concerned about potential civil unrest following the elections.

Current Deployment Limited

17. (S/NF) According to Moeen, approximately 25,000 soldiers are currently deployed in the country's six political division headquarters. The army will soon redeploy a total of 65,000 soldiers in company sized elements at the upazilla level. (There are about 490 upazillas (local administrative units) in 64 districts in Bangladesh. Districts report to one of the six divisions -- Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Rashaji or Barisal.)

18. (S/NF) The President has ordered the army to provide support to elections (by assisting civilian law enforcement with maintaining law and order) from January 10-30. Moeen said the army would have arrest authority only for January 16-22, which is contrary to press reports the military has been granted arrest authority throughout its deployment.

19. (S/NF) Moeen said soldiers would be deployed with live ammunition under rules of engagement to be specified by the military command. Soldiers may act in self-defense but must use lethal force only as a last resort when their lives are threatened and only after warnings. Even then, they should shoot to incapacitate, not kill.

Political Leaders Still Shop for International Support

¶10. (C) The Ambassador met with former President and Jatiya Party leader Lt. Gen (Ret.) HM Ershad at his request on January 8. Ershad also floated a similar scenario, namely a military backed national unity government as a possible solution to the current political impasse. (Ershad's grand alliance partner AL President Sheikh Hasina earlier told the Ambassador (Ref B) she was not troubled by military involvement if they "could make things okay.") The Ambassador told Ershad the US strongly opposes any extra-constitutional role for the military and said only a political solution could resolve the present impasse. The Ambassador's statement to the same effect to reporters after the meeting was widely covered by the press.

¶11. (C) The UN representative (protect) told the Ambassador that COAS Moeen had complained to her of the horrendous pressure he was under to step in, either under a State of Emergency or otherwise, and solicited a letter from the UN threatening loss of UNPKO duties should the military act extra-constitutionally. Moeen claimed that he could not "stick his neck out" and approach the President/Chief Adviser to beg off from any political role for the military without such benefit of proof of the dire consequences for the army.

Comment

¶12. (C) The bitter personal animosity between BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina is so intense that both women have said they would prefer to see power pass to the military rather than see the other woman in office. However, neither woman appears to imagine that they might be ousted themselves under military rule. With both sides entrenched in their respective positions, frustration among civic and business leaders continues to fuel public speculation over ways to involve the military and circumvent the BNP and AL. Even activists among the two parties continue to seek support for solutions that could sideline "the two ladies." While we will continue to see attempts to

DHAKA 00000057 003 OF 003

draw in the military at least through election day, at this point the military is holding firm.
BUTENIS